



FOUNDATION STONES  
OF THE  
DIVISION OF EXTENSION INFORMATION

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To Division Staff Members.---This is a list of what, I believe, are key points and which, I think, should be basic in your thinking, in your operations, and in your attitudes toward your contribution to the extension information job that we must all carry out jointly. I should appreciate it if you would read and think about these key points. If you have any suggestions or comments regarding them they will be very welcome. - Lester A. Schlup, Chief, Division of Extension Information.

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- (1) We keep extension information in constant mesh with program administration.

Our information objectives and activities must at all times be attuned closely to rural needs as reflected in congressional acts and administrative policies interpreting congressional acts. Whether we relish it or not this is a period of constant change. One of the responsibilities of agricultural information is to keep farm people from becoming confused about the various agricultural programs, the reasons for them, and how they operate. People are not accepting new programs or new public policies without understanding, careful consideration, and, at times, serious questioning. Extension faces a vast educational challenge in the field of providing background information on various aspects of public policy, such as price, farm income, credit, marketing, health, community planning, housing, international relations, and similar matters on which cooperative thinking and action are needed.

The use of mass communication media in getting vital national information to farm people is an important part of the function of the Cooperative Extension Service as the educational arm of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. In view of this, it is the responsibility of the Division of Extension Information to think in terms of national agricultural programs and policies and to reflect such thinking in specific information action activities developed, of course, with the proper administrative officials and subject-matter authorities. Such information activities, carried out through regular extension channels and in the regular extension way, should be designed to help farm people to understand current policies and programs and enable them better to take advantage of possible opportunities for rural social and economic improvement.



- (2) We keep constantly in mind that the Cooperative Extension Service is an institution of democracy, which combines the advantages of centralized programming for the common agricultural welfare with the advantages and flexibility of decentralized interpretation and adaptation.

The Cooperative Extension Service is not a so-called straight-line Government agency of the usual type. It draws its finances, its program, its inspiration, its leadership, and its administration from Federal, State, and county governments and from farm people. Its principles of teaching and dissemination of information are thoroughly grounded in the democratic way of doing things. That is its greatest strength.

Because extension work is meant, primarily, to help farm people to improve themselves, its effectiveness must lie in capable leadership and good example, in sound and dependable information fairly interpreted .....but never in professional dictation.....never in the clever, persuasive art of propaganda.

- (3) We must have the facts.

Since the Cooperative Extension Service is not a straight-line Government agency, leadership is exercised in the most difficult, yet most effective way possible. It is exercised by virtue of merit rather than by the exercise of Federal authority. Judicious leadership, as maintained by the Cooperative Extension Service, depends for its success upon the intelligence, ability, and personality of the leader. It relies primarily upon a knowledge of the facts, ability to marshal the facts in logical order, and understanding of how to present the facts to encourage the necessary actions. Underlying these factors must be a thorough understanding of national policies and appreciation of local points of view.

To be successful, we need to span in our thinking the great distance between national objectives and the point of view of farm people on the land. That means frequent consultation with other Federal extension workers who are in close touch with the field, with State extension workers, and, as much as possible, with county extension workers. Our contribution will suffer unless it is kept intensely practical, never theoretical.



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- (4) We try to view our work and program as objectively as possible from the broad perspective of the public interest.

We recognize that we are employed with public funds to serve farm people, working, of course, through the mechanism of the Cooperative Extension Service. In serving farm people and the public interest, we try to bring to our work as deep an understanding as possible of national and international developments, of the whole framework in which agriculture and the Cooperative Extension Service function.

That means that we must take the long perspective absorb and weigh the information we acquire, and apply it in terms of the job we have to do. To do that properly we must keep our eyes above the litter on the desk, and learn not to consider the details of paper work, conferences, and similar activities as objectives in themselves.

- (5) We believe that information is effective only insofar as it is read or heard, assimilated, and most important of all, acted upon to the end that it influences for good the lives of men, women, and youth.

People read only what they want to read and listen only to whom they want to hear. Having done either, they are still free to analyze and then to reject or accept what they read or hear. The success of a national or regional agricultural program, then, cannot be measured in terms of the volume of publications distributed from Washington, press releases issued from Washington, Washington-dated newspaper items clipped, or time given to the program on national or regional networks, as worthy as these activities may be. Changes in practices are primarily the result of how the individual reached relates the information to his own experience, his neighbor's experience, and what it means to him personally.

To be genuinely effective, then, the information must be presented in terms of local experience, understanding and knowledge. That means that national agricultural information, to be effective, must be adapted to State and local situations. It must be based upon or in conformity with research undertaken as close as possible to the point where it is released. It must be written with an understanding of local rural psychology and in the words that farm people understand. It must be issued from the closest authoritative source to the farm people by someone in whom they have



complete confidence. In view of that, we should encourage and promote as much as possible the principle of local adaptation of national agricultural information as a means of making that information more effective.

- (6) We regard the county extension agent as the keystone of the Cooperative Extension Service.

The success of extension work is dependent upon the effectiveness of educational activities carried on by the agents in the counties. We should not lose sight of the fact that county extension agents constitute the frontier between science and the application of science to the solution of rural problems.

A large percentage of our time, then, should be devoted to working through the regular channels (State extension services) in servicing and aiding county extension agents to strengthen their use of visual and information media and thereby encourage them in these ways of reducing their personal service loads and of widening their influence to people not ordinarily reached through personal participation in extension activities. This should be done in addition to the support we give to county extension work through national media, such as magazines, the radio, and the press.

- (7) We do not regard the dissemination of information as the exclusive property of the information specialist.

The dissemination of information is the basic responsibility of every extension worker. As specialists in certain techniques of mass communication of ideas, our responsibility is not confined exclusively to the use of such techniques. Equally important is our responsibility for sharing our specialized knowledge in these fields with other extension workers.

It is one of our functions, then, to see that this specialized knowledge is given to as many other extension workers as possible and to encourage them not only to use information and visual media in their work, but also to pass on to their associates a working knowledge of these media. This sharing can be accomplished through information and visual technique schools, publications, and in other ways.



- (8) We maintain an attitude of close cooperation with other divisions of the Federal Extension Service, with the USDA Office of Information, with other Federal agencies, and with State extension services.

Information materials cannot be prepared in a vacuum. A successful information program must take into consideration policy, subject matter, economic background, the psychology of interpretation, public communication media, public relations, inter- and intra-agency relations, spot checking, and similar factors. It should, therefore, be a joint effort of administrative officers, supervisors, program leaders, subject matter and economic specialists, information media specialists, specialists in training methods, and the like. The information specialist can constitute the spearhead of a successful public relations and information program, but he cannot provide its basic substance, nor can he get very far without the concerted, cooperative, and coordinated action of many other persons.

Cooperation and support from our associates, then, means frequent consultation with them regarding developments in the field in which they work. It may also mean frequent compromise of our points of view with theirs. Sound public relations demand alertness and some healthy skepticism. However, there is no other field where it is so essential to maintain balance, good judgment, and a constructive attitude as a basis for continued cooperation. We may not always fully agree with some of the policies, we may not always see eye-to-eye with our associates. However, the information worker whose vision is so clouded that he becomes critical of others loses the confidence of everyone and his usefulness in the information field. It is important to maintain a cordial, helpful, and objective attitude.

- (9) Similarly, we work together within the Division in the finest possible spirit of harmony.

We exchange ideas and information among ourselves, assume one another's assignments when necessary, adopt a cooperative approach which multiplies our powers, and sink personal credit in the interest of the whole extension program.



(10) We maintain the highest professional standards possible.

Public relations, the planning and execution of information programs which utilize all the media and channels to reach the public, and the production and use of visual aids are highly specialized activities.

Therefore, it is important to keep in constant touch through study, reading, and observation with new developments in these fields. This is important in order that new advances may be communicated to the field or that new extension ideas developed by one extension worker may be shared with others.

(11) We believe in flexibility.

Policy making, coordination, planning, and supervision are administratively centralized functions. However, planning and, particularly, the execution of plans, will be considerably strengthened if the individual staff member is given full opportunity to participate, by contributing ideas and suggestions, and to demonstrate imagination, initiative, and vigor in discharging delegated responsibilities.

In view of this, considerable latitude is given to staff members to formulate ways of making their work most effective. This is a policy which we believe will build the individual for larger service, encourage the development of creative talents, and stimulate a greater and more intelligent staff contribution.